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RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7400  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC IMMEDIATE  
INFO RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE 2543  
RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT IMMEDIATE 2312  
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE 4803  
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM IMMEDIATE 4331

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SUBJECT: SAUDI MEDIA ON EVE OF THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT

¶1. Saudi Arabia's media has hailed the President's historic visit to the Middle East and has watched with great interest the first two legs of the trip. Editor-in-Chief of influential newspaper Al-Riyadh welcomed the President's views about the Kingdom stating "the friendship and cooperation between the U.S. and the Kingdom is the oldest friendship in the Middle East region." Crown Prince Sultan stated that the President's visit will be good for Muslims and Arabs, and all major dailies emphasized that the President's visit is a gesture of respect and a confirmation of their deep friendship. Most editorialists have adopted a wait and see attitude towards the President's push on the peace process during his tour of the region.

¶2. Coverage of the President's meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders has focused on the President's clear pronouncements on an expected comprehensive peace agreement by the end of this year. Sample headlines include: Al-Watan (January 11) Bush: No Wall and No Checkpoints in a New Palestinian State; Al-Jezirah (January 11) Bush: I Will Intervene (and strongly) for an Israeli-Palestinian Agreement to be Concluded by the End of Year; Al-Sharq Al-Awsat (January 11) Bush Expects an Agreement This Year and the Establishment of a Palestinian State Not Like "Swiss Cheese"; Al-Hayat (January 11) Bush Proposes an International Mechanism for Compensating the Refugees, and Calls on the Arabs to Extend a Hand to Israel. Coverage focused largely on the President's call "to end the Israeli occupation of lands captured in the 1967 war." News commentators emphasized the unique clarity of this statement, and underscored that President Bush was the first American president to call for the creation of a Palestinian state.

¶3. As the President moved to the Gulf region, media focus shifted eastward as well to Iran. All papers headlined the President's discussion with the Kuwaiti Amir Sabah Al-Ahmad on the Iranian nuclear file and Kuwait's refusal to participate in a strike on Iran (Al-Riyadh January 12). Al-Hayat's (January 12) coverage also highlighted ongoing discussions between the U.S. and Kuwait on the threats facing the Gulf from the problem of extremism funded by Tehran. Some editors expressed reservations about Arab involvement in what they perceive as the "coming Iranian confrontation with the U.S.," stating that, "Arabs cannot be reserve allies for the U.S. against Iran," (Al-Riyadh, January 9). Foreign Minister Saud Al-Faisal's press conference January 9 and his statement calling on all Gulf countries, including Iran, to exercise self-restraint following the U.S.-Iranian naval incident in

the Strait of Hormuz were widely covered.

14. The President's visit has spurred political analysts to reflect on Saudi Arabia's pivotal role on the breadth of the region's issues. An Al-Watan editorial (January 12) reaffirmed "that Saudi Arabia is an essential axis for any political movement in the region." It hailed President Bush as the first who realized Saudi Arabia's importance and stated that the Bush Administration will soon realize that King Abdullah's initiative, which has been adopted by the Arab States, is the best basis for a lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. Other Saudi editorialists debated the wisdom of lending Saudi leadership to U.S. goals for the region. Optimists hope that President Bush's visit will act as an investment in arriving at the political concessions needed for progress on the peace process. Others wondered if Washington's view of the region was too far from the view of Arab capitals on the path to reaching regional stability in all its aspects. (Al-Okaz, January 12).  
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